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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a study in which questionnaires were mailed to 50 British beginning headteachers to examine professional induction, highlighting the means by which respondents journeyed from teacher to principal. The survey focused on how the process of professional development evolved; the extent to which a headteacher, given some external constraints, could autonomously develop a local policy; how beginning headteachers could influence the existing school and the development of individual teachers; and what encourages and discourages people from aspiring to headship. Data from 27 respondents indicated that the most common prior experiences which helped respondents adapt to their new roles were: support of the previous headteacher in providing development opportunities as a deputy headteacher; time as an acting headteacher; and the National Professional Qualification for Headship preservice certification process. The most urgent problems immediately facing them were teacher recruitment and buildings and accommodations. Respondents noted a need to develop skills in budget setting and maintenance, as well as in decision making and prioritizing. They attempted to develop these skills through focused training or by working with peers or more experienced colleagues. The local education authority was the most regular contact point for respondents seeking support and advice. (SM)

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The professional induction of headteachers in England: Findings from the IBPS project

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The professional induction of headteachers in England: Findings from the IBPS project

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Introduction

This paper reports on the data gathered through a self-completion questionnaire administered to a sample of headteachers in England who took up post in September, 2000. The survey is part of a larger, international study (The International Beginning Principals Study – IBPS) which aims to investigate and report on the experiences of beginning headteachers and principals during their first two years in post. Research teams are undertaking parallel studies in other countries, including Belgium, Canada, Netherlands and USA. Four research questions underpin the design of questionnaires used in all countries, thus allowing for data to be compared across the countries whilst allowing each questionnaire to reflect linguistic , cultural and structural differences between school systems. The four basic research questions are:

1. How does the process of professional development evolve, what are the main determinants and can we distinguish different patterns?
2. To what extent is it possible for a headteacher – given some external constraints – to develop autonomously a local policy?
3. How (and to what degree) can a beginning headteacher influence the existing school (daily organisation; structures; culture) and the development of individual teachers?
4. What encourages and discourages people from aspiring to headship?

This paper investigates the data that can be applied to the principle of professional induction, the means by which the incoming person makes the journey from being a teacher to being a principal. This is a different process than becoming familiar with the administrative details of the school and of the district. It is to do with both the growth of the individual and the realisation of the demands of the job. This is the time when the principal realises the extent of the post and is accompanied by a dawning recognition of how the new position demands more from them than they perhaps expected when they accepted the appointment.

Questionnaire design

Each of the four research questions was included in draft questionnaires which were generic to all teams in the early stages of the project. Later adaptation was undertaken to reflect linguistic, cultural and structural differences between school systems. In England the primary difference of title of the post holder was the first consideration. Care also needed to be taken to reflect the considerable gap between the autonomy and control of resources enjoyed by headteachers in a school system (now

firmly based on the principle of devolved decision-making) and that seen in other countries involved in this project. At the time of this survey 85 per cent of total potential resource had to be devolved to schools by statute, with this figure due to extend to 90 per cent during the next two years. This effectively makes headteachers the key decision makers in terms of hiring and firing of staff as well as for purchase of goods and services used by the school. By law every school in England has a governing body that is representative of local stakeholders and has responsibility for the allocation of those resources. Headteachers are responsible for the day to day management of the school under the direction of the governing body, yet in reality school governors have neither the time nor the ability to provide more than local accountability for headteachers as all members are part-time, unpaid volunteers. The English version of the questionnaire reflects these differences and realities.

The draft version of the questionnaire to be used in England was initially adapted and extended by the head of the research team, who has considerable experience of conducting research into headship and leading programmes of professional development for headteachers. Advice was taken from the four co-researchers on the team, all of whom have personal experience as headteachers with three of them still in post. Subsequently the questionnaire was piloted with a small number of serving headteachers. Appropriate revisions were made at each stage of this process. The final, agreed version was professionally typeset and printed. The appearance is thus of high quality.

Identification of potential respondents

No central record of beginning headteachers was available to the English research team, with both central and local government officials seemingly unable or unwilling to provide the information which would allow the identification of those new to post.

Requests were made to the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), the central government department, on several occasions throughout the later stages of 2000 for details of names and school addresses of newly appointed headteachers. After what seemed to be initial agreement to release the names, prevarication was followed (in January, 2001) by refusal to release the details to the research team. The frustration caused by this was intense, especially as the team had been asked at one stage to provide guarantees that the release of the personal information to the research team would not compromise the DfEE registration under the Data Protection Act. Instead the team was supplied with the details of the contact person within each local education authority (LEA) who supplied the DfEE with details of newly appointed headteachers to the high profile annual induction conference for beginning headteachers (*Leading for Excellence*) held in London and attended by the Prime Minister for the last three years. Each LEA representative was contacted within the region

where the English research team had determined to locate its investigation[1] with limited success in most instances, although four LEAs were extremely supportive.

Another possible source of support was the Headteacher Leadership and Management Programme (Headlamp) which is available to all first time appointees to headship. This is a grant worth £2500 (US$4000) to be spent on their own professional development through the first two years of their post. This grant is administered on behalf of the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) by an externally contracted service and requires voluntary registration by the post holder. Attempts were made to elicit the necessary details from the Headlamp administration unit, again without success, nor would they agree to act as a mailing service for the project. Until 1999 the unit used to provide up to date lists of all newly appointed headteachers to approved providers (with whom 80 per cent of the Headlamp funds must be spent). With the sponsors of this research recognised as one of the 400 authorised providers the details sought for this project would have automatically been available to the research team. With the change of control of Headlamp moving between central government agencies during 1999, following the quinquennial review of the Teacher Training Agency (DfEE, 1999), this procedure was terminated. Enquiries directed to the Headlamp administration unit in January, 2001 confirmed that this information was no longer available to approved providers, even on request.

Outside of government agencies the principal weekly educational newspaper had extensive records of headteacher vacancies but no central systematic database. An extensive list of advertised vacancies was purchased from a private organisation and was used to cross check and confirm data from other sources. This data revealed which posts had not been re-advertised from which the team were able to assume that the post had been filled. However, the data did not give the name and personal contact details of the new post holder nor did it indicate whether the 'new' post holder was in fact a headteacher in their second or subsequent headship, an acting headteacher or a seconded headteacher .

The most profitable source of information turned out to be the delegate list for *Leading for Excellence* conference held in November, 2000, for which the team was eventually able to gain a copy. Even so, information on the delegate list was incomplete. The list did not include school addresses, LEA name or location. As a result the research team spent over 30 hours cross referencing school names with an Internet map database (LYCOS) and the published education directories in order to match delegate and school names with specific contact information. The possible survey population from this list was 250. After eliminating those on the delegate list who had been in service for a substantial period (and who had attended the conference as expert practitioners) and those who had been appointed before September, 2000 (all headteachers appointed in 2000 were invited as were some from 1999

[1] The research team intend to conduct follow up work with respondents, including face to face interviews and

who had missed the previous conference), this total was finally reduced to 69 through identification of post holders in the geographical location chosen by the research team. A further 18 potential respondents were also identified courtesy of the four LEAs who co-operated with the team's search, leaving the team with a potential survey population of 87.

Each potential respondent was mailed a pack which explained the purpose of the project, identified the research team and detailed the extent of their commitment if they were to join the project as a respondent. Subsequently each was telephoned to establish both their eligibility to be part of the survey population and their willingness to participate. A number were found to be ineligible because they were internal appointments who actually had been up graded to the substantive post in May or June 2000. In the main, however, the response from the schools was excellent, with only four outright refusals to contribute. The remainder of non-respondents mainly cited pressures of work as their reason for not being able to take part. It is worth recording that the vast majority of those who were either ineligible or who felt unable to contribute asked to be kept informed of the project outcomes in the future.

A total of 50 questionnaires were mailed in mid-February, with each participant having been briefed by telephone conversation as to tbe demands of the questionnaire – particularly the time needed to answer the questions which was estimated at between 60 and 90 minutes as a result of piloting of the instrument. The mailing was timed to precede the mid-term break as it was anticipated that a number of respondents would prefer the opportunity of filling in the questionnaire during a period when the school was not in session. By mid-March, 2001 a total of 27 completed questionnaires had been received. This paper is informed by these returns for although further returns are anticipated, the time before the AERA convention is limited thus precluding some further data which may appear subsequently.

The rate of return reported here compares favourably with the vacancy rate in the LEAs within the geographical area selected for this study from which the respondents came. Within those LEAs there were 144 vacancies. The 27 respondents for this survey thus represent a 21 per cent sample of the total population. The sample of respondents includes seven from the secondary sector ('n' = 7/23; a ratio of 20 per cent) and 20 from the primary sector ('n' = 20/121; a ratio of 17 per cent).

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focus group meetings. The potential survey population was restricted geographically as a consequence.

The respondents

All respondents worked in maintained schools, eight of which were of religious denomination. One secondary school was single sex, with one more being selective. Primary schools ranged in size from 28 to 407 pupils; secondary schools ranged in size from 257 to 1400 pupils.

16 of the respondents had gained the National Professional Qualification for Headship[2] (NPQH), the pre-service certification process based on national standards for headteachers (Teacher Training Agency, 1998) which is due to become mandatory in 2002.

There were 18 female and nine male respondents. Within the secondary phase there were five male headteachers as opposed to two females; within the primary sector there were four male headteachers as opposed to 16 females. These ratios are in line with national statistics (DfEE, 1998) that show the vast majority of secondary headships are held by men (75 per cent in 1997), whilst more primary headships are held by women (55 per cent in 1997).

In terms of initial qualifications 22 of the sample were graduates, with only nine apparently going through the one year postgraduate certification route for their teaching qualification. The remaining 13 graduates were likely, therefore, to have completed their first degree studies in Education with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) being awarded alongside their degree. The five non-graduates will almost certainly have achieved QTS through the 3 year teacher certification route. Nine of the respondents had gained a higher degree (one doctorate), with only one achieving that award without an initial degree.

Findings

The most commonly cited prior experiences that helped the respondents to adapt to their new role were the support of their previous headteacher in providing development opportunities as a deputy headteacher, with 14 respondents nominating these experiences as the most influential. Six respondents indicated time as an acting headteacher as the most significant factor helping them adapt to their new role, with an identical number also citing NPQH. Amongst the remaining responses the emergent issues included time as an adviser/consultant (2 responses), access to a consultant (1), the inspiration of other teachers (1), studying for a higher degree (1), participating in bids for national funding (1), experience of disciplinary/competency procedures (2), working with the governing body (1), of being in a school in special measures (2) and working abroad (1)..

[2] NPQH is the first formalised preparation programme for aspirant in headteachers in England. Available since early 1997, the programme is currently undertaken voluntarily although enabling legalisation will allow the Secretary of State for Education make the qualification compulsory from 2002.

The most urgent problem facing them during the first five months of their new post was the recruitment of teaching staff (11 responses), with buildings and accommodation second (7 responses). Working with inadequate deputies (5), dealing with falling rolls (4), parental opinion (3) and staff motivation (3), budget setting and budget deficits (3) were the other major issues, although mention was also made of the curriculum (1), cover for staff absence (2), student behaviour (1), organisation of classes (1), national test results (1), student disaffection (1) changes in catchment areas (2), performance management (1), non-contact time (1) and union action (1).

The additional skills and/or knowledge needed by the respondents for them to perceive themselves as an effective leader were headed by the desire to be able to set and manage school budgets, with five respondents indicating this as their highest priority. Decision-making and the ability to prioritise were ranked equal second by four respondents each. Other principal issues were delegation (3 responses), looking patient and calm (3), ICT skills for school administration and management (3) and dealing with legal and governmental issues. Other responses included dealing with the capability and/or misconduct of staff (2), managing the pace/rate of change (2), time to reflect on alternative approaches (2), assertiveness (2), diplomacy (2), time management (2) and being a positive role model (2). All other issues were only identified by a single respondent.

The most common activity employed by respondents attempting to acquire those skills was to engage in focused training (14 responses). Making use of headteacher colleagues as consultants was signalled by eight respondents as critical, with another six also making use of someone acting informally in the role as consultant. Training provided by the LEA (6 responses) was marginally ahead of that provided by formal Headlamp activities (5) and in-depth and focused reading (5). Activities attracting more than one vote included the provision of time for staff development (3), taking time off (2), practising (3), consulting professional associations (2), consulting the LEA (2), to be listened to and observed (2).

The people from whom the respondents found most support and advice were LEA personnel (24 responses), usually in the form of advisers and officers. Turning to headteacher colleagues was another clear favourite with 19 citing the advice of colleagues from their own cluster of local schools and 13 looking to the headteacher of their previous school. The chair of the governing body (8) and working with a mentor (8) both featured well, although asking colleagues on the senior leadership team within the school was ranked lower (5), as was seeking advice from the family (5). Friends (4), respected members of staff (4), peers from the Headlamp group (4) and professional associations (3) all had a role from some colleagues without being a common source of advice. Little help was identified as coming from NPQH (1), senior support staff (1), past colleagues (1) or higher education (0), although two respondents indicated that the diocese was a useful source of reference.

Discussion

The finding that newly appointed headteachers cited the support of their previous headteacher as the most formative issue in assisting them to adapt to the headship mirrors the findings of the National Headteacher Survey conducted in 1999 by the author (Male, 2000) which revealed this to be single most important development opportunity for deputy headteachers in primary schools. Making the professional transition to headship is more demanding than anticipated (Daresh and Male, 2000) with realistic opportunities to practice aspects of the role frequently not available to aspirant headteachers. Being able to engage in authentic tasks whilst a deputy is recognised in this study as beneficial to those beginning their headship, as was the opportunity afforded to the six respondents who had spent time as an acting headteacher. The responses of those with NPQH who saw the qualification as helpful should come as a surprise to the sponsoring government department, with only six of the 16 holders nominating it as the most influential prior experience. The surprise would emanate from the view that the purpose of NPQH is to prepare post holders for the demand of their new role. This finding triggers the need for further research with the respondents to see whether the hypothesis proposed by the author (Male, 1997) that NPQH is largely about technical competence and is of limited use to the beginning headteacher needing to deal with complex social problems. Other prior experiences cited by the respondents do not seem generalisable, given the small numbers.

The most pressing problem was clearly the appointment of teaching staff. This is to be expected given the current teacher shortages in England caused by a number of factors over recent times that has seen increasing numbers leaving the profession and few willing to join. At the time of writing the government is offering 'golden hellos' to students recruiting to teacher training courses in shortage subjects and is also offering bonuses ('golden handcuffs') to those who stay in post for a period of time after qualifying. Issues to do with building maintenance and repairs was the next most urgent task cited by respondents, again a finding which causes little surprise to those in a school system that has an estimated £3 billion pounds of repairs outstanding. With increasing delegation of budgets to the school level many of these issues to do with buildings and accommodation are now the direct concern of headteachers. The inheritance of inadequate deputies, falling rolls and budget problems was causing concern for a few respondents as were staff motivation and the effect of parental opinion. In some cases this would suggest that some issues were not evident to the incoming headteacher during the selection process and in other cases there were issues that probably align themselves to issues that were apparent and may well have been one of the challenges that attracted the successful applicant to the post. In both cases further research s signalled. Other urgent issues seem, by dint of small numbers, to be organisationally specific.

The need to develop skills in budget setting and maintenance came a surprise, firstly as three of the five respondents signalling this need had completed NPQH and, secondly, because most schools have by now managed complex budgets for many years. The NPQH requires evidence of capability in these skills, so further research is needed here to investigate the local circumstances which prevailed for those three headteachers. In addition, to find any headteachers who did not feel confident of this skill is surprising given that locally managed budgets have been a feature of school management for some since 1988 and has been required of all maintained schools since 1994. The identification of decision-making skills, the ability to prioritise and to delegate fits with earlier findings (Daresh and Male, 2000) that the complexity of real problems encountered by beginning headteachers supersedes their ability to deal with isolated incidents, which had been their most common experience as deputies or on training courses. The desire to look patient and calm is one of the attributes of symbolic leadership (Bolman and Deal, 1994) and is something that has become essential in a school system racked by constant change, most of it government initiated. Indeed, government actions were identified by respondents as being the most powerful external influence experienced during their early months in role, with the pressure of central legislation, national projects and new curricula cited as the top ranked of all potential sources of influence. The need to develop ICT skills for management tasks and the need to develop understanding of legal issues, the two next ranked skills identified by respondents for further development, corresponds to the findings of the national headteacher survey (Male, 2000) which demonstrated these to be two of the skills for which the majority of headteachers did not feel well prepared on taking up post. It would seem that many of the remaining skills identified by small numbers of respondents could be accommodated in the above categories, something future data analysis will attempt to do.

The attempts to develop those skills through focused training or through working with peers or more experienced headteacher colleagues again mirrors the findings of the national headteacher survey where these were the top ranked responses to skills development. LEA programmes featured positively here for a few respondents as did Headlamp, although it is worth pointing out that many training activities would have been funded by Headlamp even if not recognised as Headlamp specific. Self-development (through reading) and time to reflect both featured well as strategies for further development as did consulting professional associations and the LEA.

The LEA, in fact, was the most regular contact point for the respondents in this study when seeking advice with headteacher colleagues from the locality or from their previous school providing another important channel of guidance and advice. With the chair of governing body and mentors being next ranked, it becomes clear that most beginning headteachers are seeking professional rather than personal advice and guidance, an indication given further credence by the citing of peers and senior members of staff as important sources by some respondents. Some still feel the need for personal

support mechanisms, however, with several citing family and friends as principal sources of advice. Other useful sources of advice were professional associations and, in specific instances, the Diocese. The other sources identified were done so by very few respondents, making the findings less than generalisable.

Conclusion

Several important clues have emerged from this initial analysis of data as to the range of issues facing newly appointed headteachers. Further analysis of the data is needed, however, followed by the second phase of the project before we can to make these findings more concrete. The next phase of data gathering will be through telephone interviews with individual respondents in order to clarify responses and through focus group meetings where initial findings will be tested for validity. Those interested in the study as it progresses are invited to keep in touch with the author; those requiring a copy of the questionnaire are similarly invited to write to the author.

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